



THE DEPOT MUSEUM

& HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AVON PARK

"Your Ticket to the Past"

March 2023 Edition

Celebrating 100 years of Baseball

Three Avon Park landmarks reach the century mark in 2025. Construction on the Hotel Jacaranda began in 1925. The depot building that houses our Museum was built in 1925 and Charles Head convinced city leaders to build a professional baseball field suitable for major league spring training in 1925. And so began this city's love affair with baseball.



This is a story that needs to be told and now is the time. With strong community support, we have "rounded first" Thank you to the generous donors who have gotten us this far.

As our scoreboard shows, we are only in the third inning, with donations totaling \$133K. You can be a part of this legacy going forward to ensure that we reach our goal of \$500K. Donations can be sent to the Museum and GeoDev Financial Services.

Players and fans alike have vivid memories of the 1940 and 50's "Glory Days" when the sports pages recorded high school baseball victories and even a state championship or two. As we begin to collect baseball memorabilia that will be exhibited in our museum expansion project, we are hearing from folks who are eager to share those memories. News clippings, photos, sports uniforms and equipment that help to tell the story are now being accepted at the Museum. Please contact us if you have something to share or loan. Visit during regular Museum hours or call 863-453-3525 for an appointment.



And help has come from unexpected places. The bronze statue shown here was found by museum volunteer Vickie David at a recent Fly Wheelers event. It is quite heavy and help was needed to get it from her car to the museum.

Visiting from Jacksonville, Arturo Rankin and nephew Arthur were near by and provided the necessary muscle.

AVIATION HISTORY

by Nancy Fisk

The Lodwick Aviation Military Academy in Avon Park, provided Army Air Corps cadets with primary flight training on PT-17 Speaman trainers, shown here. There was also a Lodwick training facility in Lakeland, Florida. A total of 14,000 cadets were trained at these facilities. They had an impressive safety record, recording only 8 fatalities. The training required that the cadets learn maneuvers that we would consider stunts. They learned to “roll” the plane actually flying upside down at times. These maneuvers were necessary to enable pilots to fly under or evade enemy aircraft. While practicing this maneuver, a cadet, flying solo, fell from the plane he was piloting and parachuted to the ground. He was unhurt, but the plane crashed into an oak hammock on private property near the Mel Smith Airport, where the training took place.



The practice field near the Avon Park Airport was leased from Mel Smith, land owner and farmer. In 1942, Mr. Smith had in his employ one Edward McClelland, age 18. McClelland did not witness the crash, but knew where the plane went down. When Lodwick personal were finally able to locate the plane, it was determined it would be too difficult to remove it. Instruments were salvaged and the plane was left behind.

Years later, the “resting place” of the plane was property leased by Edward McClelland’s son Harold. When the lease was granted to someone else, Harold McClelland decided to move the damaged plane and store it in his barn. Enter, Hal Thompson from Arcadia who was given the plane and rebuilt it using the salvaged parts and spare parts from other planes. The rebuilt plane was mounted on a trailer and shown at festivals and special events.

Mr. Thompson, now in his 90’s, sold the plane at a recent Fly Wheelers event to Jay Wisler of Tampa. Mr. Wisler, anxious to learn as much about the plane as he could, came to the museum to conduct some research (page 3) and found an account of a plane crash and assumed, incorrectly, that the plane involved was the one he had purchased.

Harold McClelland graciously granted an interview and revealed that about the time the crash in the oak hammock occurred, there was another crash in a field across State Rt 64. This second crash is the one reported in the Avon Park Sun because, tragically, both the instructor and the cadet perished. The plane was destroyed—only a few pieces of metal were found, making it impossible to reconstruct a plane from what remained.

❖ MUSEUM HAPPENINGS ❖



Ron Hodges (left) of Lakeland and Jay Wisler of Tampa visited our Museum to research a plane crash that occurred near the Avon Park airport in 1943. The crash resulted in the death of the Lodwick flight instructor and aviation cadet on board. Mr. Wisler purchased what was left of the plane at a Fly Wheelers event and is trying to learn more about the plane and the crash. He has been able to find very little on line and decided to go “old school” and seek out a primary source, namely the Avon Park Sun newspaper. He was pleased to discover that there is, indeed, a

story in the October 27, 1943 edition that gave the names of those who perished, but no information describing the plane. Mr. Wisler said that the military was reluctant to give details of such events during wartime and quite often failed to make public the fact that a crash had occurred at all. His search to identify the plane goes on.

❖ MORE RESEARCH ACTIVITY ❖

Tom Kallai has temporarily relocated to Avon Park after Hurricane Ian destroyed his winter home in Ft. Myers. He is a “snow bird” from Joliet, Illinois and is considering making Avon Park his future winter home. His interest in local history made him curious about the bandstand on the mall and the Hotel Verona. While using his metal detector in the area where the Hotel Verona once stood, he found a 1908 Indian head penny. With help from Docent Grace Hudson, he was able to view the collection of photographs we have in our archives. He was able to determine that the area where the penny was found was the recreation area for the hotel guests.

One of the oldest structures in the city, the original location of the bandstand on the Mall can be seen in the photograph of the Hotel Verona that hangs in the Museum.



❖ UP-COMING PROGRAMMING ❖

Our Historical Society is partnering with the Heartland Cultural Alliance to present featured speakers from the Speakers Bureau of Florida Talks, one of Florida Humanities' longest-running programs. Two lectures remain in this series. The talks will be held in the Avon Park Community Center and are being offered to the community at no charge.



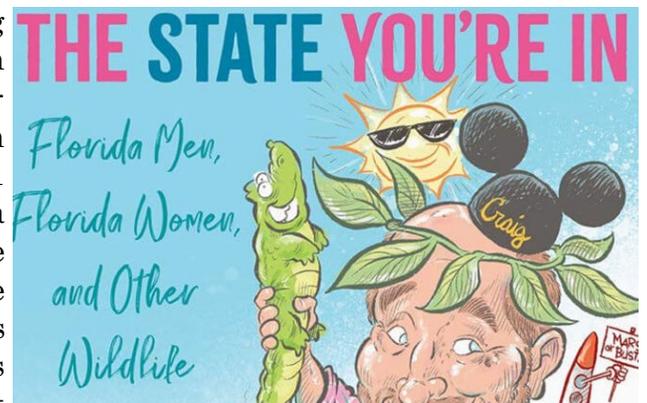
March 26, 2023 at 3:00 PM
Fabulous, Feisty Florida Females: More Than Orange Blossoms will be presented by Carrie Sue Ayvar, in honor of Women's History Month. An internationally celebrated storyteller, teaching artist, and Chautauqua scholar, Carrie Sue Ayvar is the recipient of multiple awards for service, leadership, and her dedication to the art of storytelling and education. Her bilingual blend of traditional, historical, and personal tales connect the people, languages, and cultures of Florida. Though not always in the history books, women have helped build,

form, shape, and develop Florida. Stories are of strong, courageous women like Julia Tuttle, known as the Mother of Miami, or Mary McCleod Bethune, daughter of enslaved parents who went on to become an advisor to several US presidents, and other brave women have influenced and impacted their communities, Florida, and the nation.



April 23, 2023 at 3:00 PM by Craig Pittman

A native Floridian, born in Pensacola, Craig Pittman graduated from Troy State University in Alabama, where his muckraking work for the student paper prompted an agitated dean to label him "the most destructive force on campus". After 31 years at the *Tampa Bay Times*, he now writes a weekly column on environmental issues for the Florida Phoenix and co-hosts the podcast "Welcome to Florida". He has written six non-fiction books about Florida and lives in St. Petersburg. He has written thousands of stories and columns about



"The Most Interesting State". Stories of mermaids, con men, fugitives, gator wrasslers, death row inmates, iguanas, tattooed ladies, python hunters, and more are covered in this illustrated and lively presentation about Florida men, Florida women, and other wildlife.

❖ COMMUNITY EVENTS ❖

Mark your calendar for these weekends in April. Celebrate history at the Heritage Festival on April 15 & 16 at the Pearce Homestead in Ft. Basinger. New attractions this year include a



Native American village exhibit, a world champion hoop dancer and creations by Alexandra Maxwell (right) will be featured in a colonial to the 1950's fashion show. The ecological river boat tours down the Kissimmee River will again be offered on Saturday at \$20 per person.



Gates open at 10 am

Admission \$10 per car or \$5 per person.



Donaldson Park is the place to be on April 22nd

The Historical Society's table will be laden with blueberry goodies - jam, muffins, breads and cheese cake bars, in addition to our usual museum gift shop items for sale.

Be sure to stop by to say hello and enjoy a delicious snack.



This child is sure to be back at our table this year for another delicious muffin. Yum !!

Thank you to our Corporate members

These businesses and organizations support your museum!!

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**Please consider a gift to the Historical Society
in lieu of flowers to honor the passing of a loved one.**

We gratefully acknowledge The First Christian Church in Avon Park for generously allowing us to print our newsletters in their office.

The Avon Park Chamber of Commerce has a new director and will soon have new landscaping. Chamber Director Kamla Long is hard at work making changes inside and out. In the very near future the Chamber back offices will be equipped with business machines for member use. Meeting space will also be available to Chamber members.

To make way for a new ornamental garden, the existing African iris needed a new home. Founders Garden Club members have been maintaining the Chamber garden for the past several years and also volunteer regularly at the Museum. Rosie Longanecker, Anita Helbig and Vickie David have "recycled" the plants. They are shown here introducing the plants to their new home,



THANK YOU

A TEA PARTY on the LAWN



In honor of Mothers' Day

Join us for chamber music, light refreshments and tea on May 9th at 2 pm at the Depot Museum.

**Vintage Jewelry Interpretation
by Carol Breckenridge**

Silent Auction

Bargains for sale



*Tickets are \$10 and are
available from a board
member and/or at the
Museum..*

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Deborah Crews Nancy Fisk

MUSEUM HOURS

Wed., Thursday, & Friday

10 am to 3 pm



CALENDAR of EVENTS

March 26 , 2023

Fabulous, Feisty Florida Females

April 15 & 16, 2023

Heritage Festival

April 22, 2023

Blueberry Festival

April 23, 2023

The STATE You're In

Apr. 2 and May 6

Gardening on the Grounds